

The System of Phenomenological Philosophy

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Bob Sandmeyer, *Husserl's Constitutive Phenomenology. Its Problem and Promise*. New York: Routledge, 2009

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Bob Sandmeyer, lecturer at the University of Kentucky, specialized in the German phenomenological movement, published his Ph.D. dissertation under the title *Husserl's phenomenological movement*, a book that we will review in this text. It should be noted from the start that Sandmeyer's first intention was to study Husserl's late works, namely those that the German philosopher produced after his retirement in 1928, a study guided by the focus on the conception of the historic constitution. Eventually, the author turned his attention to the entire corpus of Husserl's writings, including here also the *Nachlass* (literary estate), a decision made possible by the following discovery: the volumes in the *Husserliana* that are not among those published by Husserl himself were the outcome of an interpretative view or other from the part of the editors that concealed the direction of Husserl's investigation. The following step taken by this research was to question the possibility of a system of phenomenological movement, a system that would express just this direction of Husserl's investigation.

With this new scope, Sandmeyer's new research theme could be formulated as follows: is there a possibility to identify a unity in Husserl's thought that runs through all his published and unpublished writings and that could clarify some of his more or less apparent incongruities and disparities? Or, in the author's own words: "At issue in this investigation is not a special problem of Husserl's philosophy – such as the role of historicity in his Crisis writings – but rather the very essence of transcendental phenomenology as Husserl conceived it" (p. 31).

This is by no means an easy task. We only need to evoke those more or less apparent contradictions that could be identified in Husserl's phenomenology: realism vs. idealism, static constitution vs. genetic constitution and so on.

What about his unpublished manuscripts? When viewing them for the first time you cannot help to think that they are just a chaotic bundle of experimental and disjointed researches. Nonetheless, studying them, Sandmeyer realized an important fact about Husserl's mode of investigation, namely that it has a zigzag structure. This means that when studying a certain problem, the German philosopher used to come back after months or even years to the first formulation of his concern, and this repeatedly. Husserl did this with the intention of reconfiguring the problem in the light of his latest findings. The zigzagged mode of approach is a method requested by the nature of the phenomenological problems themselves or, to put it differently, is endemic to Husserl's philosophy. Take, for example, the distinction between the natural attitude and the transcendental one: "One begins with the natural attitude to return to it again from the quite unnatural stance of the phenomenological attitude in order to make clear and bring to expression the position-takings going on quite naturally and anonymously within the phenomenologically uncritical attitude" (p. 20). If this is the case, then Husserl's phenomenological program could be reduced to a never ending reworking and intensification of some major themes which run from the *Logical Investigations* to the *Crisis*. The exegete will capitalize on this finding by using it as guiding line through Husserl's texts: "Husserl's very style of philosophizing should thus provide us a means internal to his investigations by which to discover within them the systematic development of analyses within the total problem field of transcendental phenomenology" (p. 20).

So far we brought to light the range of Sandmeyer's study, as well as its interpretative principle. In what follows, we will undertake a brief survey of the exegete's arguments through a step by step presentation of the book's four chapters. It should be noted that the author incorporated four appendices in his book, which have relevance in the argumentative devel-

opment of this research. The first is a catalogue of Husserl's writings published during his lifetime. The second represents a translation into English of the correspondence between Husserl and Georg Misch. The third includes the draft arrangements of Husserl's Bernau time-investigations by Fink and the last one contains a variety of plans which represent the first steps taken by the German philosopher with the purpose of producing a systematic account of the phenomenological philosophy.

The first chapter, called "A Question of Focus", deals with two issues: first of all, it embarks on a discussion about the possibility of discovering a systematic explanation of phenomenology in the writings published by Husserl himself; secondly, it puts forward an overview of the corpus of texts which the German philosopher produced for his own use. Regarding the first task, the starting point of the analysis is paragraph 153 from *Ideen I* in which Husserl proposes a sketch of the full extension of the phenomenological problematic. Thus the exegete holds that the *Ideen I* articulates phenomenology as a discipline which presumes eidetic investigations and descriptions of the essential structures that are given in experience. Taking as an example the perception of a cup, Sandmeyer specifies the phenomenological outline of this experience. It is put forward here nothing less than the famous Husserlian analysis of the make-up of a transcendent perception, which, among others, includes reference to its adumbrative character, a feature that prescribes the act as an imperfect setting – there will always be a moment of the object that is meant only through an indeterminate expectation, which may or may not be fulfilled. This imperfection has a tremendous role in the constitution of the perceptual sense: it does not represent a diminishing of the experience, but rather the essential condition for the appearance of the physical object as it appears, that is as perceptual sense formed by a harmonious string of appearances. The adumbrative character of perception implies also that consciousness has a temporal character – the object is not given in a full blow, which suggests a temporal dynamic. From this scrutiny Sandmeyer concludes that "the central theme of phenomenology is precisely this dynamic on-going sense-determining consciousness" (p. 5). Even

though we have here an important feature of phenomenology, *Ideen I* was intended to represent only a first entrance into a problematic that required further refinement or, otherwise put, it was meant to provide the bridge – research theme and methodology, that is the phenomenological reduction – to upcoming concrete constitutive analyses (*Ideen II*) and to the grounding of philosophy as science by phenomenology (*Ideen III*). Having in mind that these texts never came to print, the exegete comes to the conclusion that in *Ideen I* could be found only a partial sketch of the complete systematic structuring of problems pertaining to phenomenology.

Concerning the second task of the aforementioned chapter, Sandmeyer undertakes an analysis of the structure of the *Nachlass* and of the way it was published in the *Husserliana*. One of the most important aspects that the exegete is trying to suggest is that if one tries to understand Husserl's philosophy, one must "comprehend the tangled contents of this *Nachlass*" (p. 29). But the research manuscripts confront the reader with a great difficulty: they seem to lack any form of systematic structuring. Thus it just may be the case that the editors of *Husserliana*, in the pursuit of a systematization of Husserl's *Einzeluntersuchungen* so that the thought and intentions of the German philosopher could come to light, introduced some organizational criterions – thematic, historic – that covered up a research dynamic, i.e. the zigzagged method that was at work through their making.

The second chapter, titled "A Unitary Impulse", has the mission of showing that a unitary development can be identified in Husserl's thought. In order to accomplish this, Sandmeyer takes into account two sets of letters, namely those between Husserl and Dilthey and those between Husserl and Misch. The second set has relevance in this study because Husserl states here that there is an "impulse running through his thinking from the time of his first meeting with Dilthey up to the present" (p. 51) – the letter was written in 1929. Husserl met Dilthey in 1905 and they exchanged letters in 1911. This exchange revolves around criticisms which Husserl articulates in his *Logos* essay, namely those that identify Dilthey as a historic relativist. But Dilthey also criticized Husserl for his so-

called “Platonic turn”, which seemed to be the outcome of his logicist program from the *Logische Untersuchungen*. Thus, it seems that these two philosophers were situated on two completely separate positions, a situation that makes unintelligible Husserl’s statement about the importance of his meeting with Dilthey. Sandmeyer tries to clarify this aspect, by pointing to the fact that Dilthey didn’t have any contact with Husserl’s turn to transcendentalism, which was the outcome of the development of reduction around 1905. On the contrary, the exegete will attempt to track down Husserl’s turn to the supposed influence of Dilthey. However, in his published writings (namely in the Logos article), Husserl mentions Dilthey only once. The only direct evidence about this influence can be found in Misch’s *Briefwechsel* where Husserl is said to be “maddeningly vague about the efficacy of this impulse” (p. 61).

The third chapter, titled “The Development of Constitutive Phenomenology”, offers a plausible positive articulation of the impulse mentioned above. This is probably the most important part of the book under attention. We will give here only a brief account of Sandmeyer’s explanation. Thus Husserl forced by the arguments of the life-philosophers, Misch for example, acknowledges the inadequacies of his static model of constitution, i.e. structural constitution through the hyletic data apprehended by intentional moments. At this point of development Husserl’s attention is caught by the reduction to the pure self-givennesses. The problem here is indicated by the fact that what gives itself to consciousness is not a bare fact, but rather is given to consciousness in some manner, constituted by it, which in turn implies that the I has to attend to the constitutional activity. Sandmeyer shows that the structural model of constitution fails exactly at this point, by not being able to account for the agency of the I. But this does not imply that the static model is wrong, but rather that its explicative power is limited to only a certain level. For example, being given the intentions behind *Ideen I*, namely pedagogical, it had a precise scope which it accomplished. In the Bernau time investigations Husserl will try to address these problems, a course of thought which will end with the development of a new model of constitution, i.e. the genetic one. Here,

Sandmeyer's interpretative principle comes forth. He shows how "the Bernau time investigations begin precisely where the *Logische Untersuchungen* leave off. Husserl, thus, zigzags back to the subject matter of his earliest investigations of sense-constitution (...) He sets about in the Bernau investigations to recast the earlier hard won insights within the frame of the more profound time-investigations" (p. 110).

In the fourth chapter, titled "The System of Phenomenological Philosophy", the exegete concentrates on the efforts of the German philosopher to bring together the two models of constitution, this being precisely the contour of the system of phenomenological philosophy. In order to do this Sandmeyer examines a plan from 1926 that was produced by Husserl with the intent of giving a general account of the phenomenological system and the draft plans for a book that should have been the full expression of the "System of Phenomenological Philosophy" from the early thirties, which were the outcome of the collaboration between Husserl and Fink. This presentation is particularly interesting because, among others, it circumscribes the impetus behind Husserl's decision to systematize his own philosophy. To give just an example, the rising popularity of Heidegger's philosophy had an important impact on Husserl's choice "to re-introduce his philosophy to the German and larger international academic public" (p. 127).

In the end of this review it should be stated that Sandmeyer's study will be of particular interest to those who are already acquainted with phenomenology, because it is helpful in the process of understanding some of Husserl's more puzzling turns, namely the transcendental one and the turn to a genetic model of constitution.

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